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Home Laundry Center

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, July 6, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

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JOHN BAKER:

We have an all-star cast here in Washington today. Ruth Van Deman to speak for the Bureau of Home Economics. Elizabeth Pitt to take us on a trip to the Coconino National forest. And Morrill Tozier to give us another chapter on soil conservation.

Ruth, we'll give you first place of honor - - -

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

I think I should come last today, John. I'm going to talk about washing and ironing, and the home laundry center. I feel like Cinderella.

BAKER:

Cinderella nothing. We'll put you right in the jalopy with us and take you where the tall pipes grow.

VAN DEMAN:

Think there'll be plenty of water up there?

BAKER:

Sure there will be

VAN DEMAN

Good soft water from mountain lakes and springs---that's the kind I like to wash in.

BAKER:

There's plenty of water like that---but nobody's going to do a lick of work on that trip.

VAN DEMAN:

John, you're like the bride who wrote me the other day. She and her husband were just back from their honeymoon. They'd driven I don't know how many thousands of miles in their car---and flown across to Cuba from Key West, and back to the mainland. She started off with three or four suitcases of pretty new clothes. Now they're all ready for the cleaners', or the washtub

- - -

BAKER:

I get the drift---fine trips make plenty big wash---for somebody.

VAN DEMAN:

Exactly. For this young lady up until now the somebody has been mother. She herself held down an office job---as a very efficient young secretary - - -

(over)

BAKER:

Well, what did you do for her---plan her a home laundry center?

VAN DEMAN:

No, I sent her a copy of the laundry bulletin and marked the directions on how to wash and iron. She'll probably have to wait for the laundry center until she gets a house. Now I'm just hoping she won't spoil all those pretty silks, and rayons, and dainty cotton prints.

BAKER:

Doesn't every woman know how to wash?

VAN DEMAN:

No, John, not in these days of synthetic fabrics and pastel colors. Don't you know we're no longer in the era of unbleached muslin and indigo blue and turkey red calico?

BAKER:

But there are machines.

VAN DEMAN:

Surely, wonderful machines, but you have to know how to operate them. And you have to know what to wash by hand and what to put in the machine.

That reminds me of another letter I had the other day from a Farm and Home listener in Ohio. She wanted to know if it's necessary to soak and boil clothes when you use an electric washer.

BAKER:

Can't you run 'em right through without any of that?

VAN DEMAN:

Most of the time, yes---unless things are very dirty. Then soaking in lukewarm soapy water loosens the dirt.

Now of course if we get out and hike through the Coconino Forest with Elizabeth Pitt and get a lot of that Arizona dust ground into our clothes -----

BAKER:

I'm going to wear my khaki shirt---the dirt won't show.

VAN DEMAN:

That's no way out. Don't you know it's often harder to get colored clothes clean than white ones?

BAKER:

Not my camp clothes. They like to be treated rough.

VAN DEMAN:

They're the exception that proves the rule. Most clothes are not exactly improved by rubbing and rubbing on a washboard. And it wears out the washing machine faster if you have to run it a long, long time to get things clean. And while it's running, so's the electric bill -----.

BAKER:

Mounting is the word for that.

VAN DEMAN:

I see you know.

BAKER:

I certainly do know. With two small children in the family, the washing machine gets pretty hard use. And by the way, how do you get cod-liver oil stains out the bathroom rug?

VAN DEMAN:

That's a bad one. Cod liver oil makes an ugly brown stain.

BAKER:

And the rug's such a beautiful pure white.

VAN DEMAN:

You're lucky it's white. If it were a color you wouldn't be able to use a bleach if you have to, to get out the last traces. But maybe the stain's still fresh - - -

BAKER:

It happened yesterday - - -

VAN DEMAN:

Try carbon tetrachloride. That will probably take it all out. I'm quite sure that's what the stain removal bulletin recommends.

Now going back a moment to that question about boiling clothes.

BAKER:

I didn't mean to get you off the track.

VAN DEMAN:

No, you're not getting me off the track at all. By all the rules of good laundering, I should have talked about taking out stains before clothes get near hot soapsuds.

Besides we're used to emergency calls about taking out stains. The stain removal bulletin is our first-aid manual. I don't think a day goes by that we don't get a call or a letter from somebody who's upset the ink bottle or stepped too close to the axle grease and smudged the white trousers, or spilled grape juice on the best tablecloth.

This morning it was a librarian wanting to know how to take out grass stains. She'd spent the Fourth of July on the golf course.

BAKER:

Better at put-ting on the shelves than putt-ing on the green.

VAN DEMAN:

Now, now, I was sympathetic with you about the cod liver oil. And really getting back to this matter about boiling clothes, I want to make it clear that the laundry experts are not in favor of it.

BAKER:

Why not?

VAN DEMAN:

Well, it seems to be one of those old-time practices that are likely to do more harm than good. The only clothes that will stand boiling at all are white cottons and linens. And there's no magic in it even for them. Boiling doesn't take dirt out, and it's likely to turn even white things yellow. As for white silks and rayons, very hot water ruins them, and it isn't good for any colored clothes, though they may be marked colorfast.

The laundry people say, rinse rather than boil. After washing in luke-warm soap suds, then rinse clothes once, maybe twice, in lots of hot water.

BAKER:

Hot water? I always supposed you rinsed clothes in cold water.

VAN DEMAN:

Not while they have soap in them. Cold water hardens the soap, makes it very difficult to rinse out. Don't you remember the chapter on detergents in your household chemistry?

BAKER:

I'm afraid I skipped that.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, the laundry bulletin is a good substitute. There's a section on soaps and cleansing agents---and another on water---suggestions for softening hard water.

BAKER:

That is a tough problem, especially in the alkali regions.

VAN DEMAN:

In places like that a regular water-softening system with zeolites is a great convenience. That way you can have soft water for laundry work and everything else.

BAKER:

What are zeolites.

VAN DEMAN:

Clay-like substances in tanks you pass the water through. The chemical compounds in the zeolites react with the minerals in the water. And when the water comes out the spigot, the calcium and other minerals that make the water hard are left behind in the zeolites.

BAKER:

This is exceedingly interesting, but if we're going to get to the Cocco-nino Forest in Arizona today - - -

VAN DEMAN:

I'm willing to let the rest of the washing and ironing wait - - -

BAKER:

Don't go until I've got the titles of these two bulletins straight.

VAN DEMAN:

Just say home laundering bulletin. That's enough.

BAKER:

And stain removal---will that be sufficient?

VAN DEMAN:

Entirely. If the girls in our mail room see home laundering and stain removal on a post card, they'll know what's wanted all right.

BAKER:

Then if anyone wants these two bulletins on home laundering and stain removal all you need to do is write those four words---home laundering, stain removal---on a post card, and address the post card to the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

VAN DEMAN:

And don't forget to mail the post card.

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